HOME SAFETY

What's Unsafe About This Bathroom?

There are seven safety dangers in this bathroom. Can you spot them all? Be sure to correct any similar examples in your own bathroom.

ANSWERS

(1) A plugged in blow-dryer is balanced on the edge of the sink, which has water in it. Keep electrical cords and appliances away from water and don't use them with wet hands.

(2) A razor blade is lying on the sink. Such a small, hard-to-pick-up and sharp item is extremely dangerous. Discard or dispose of razor blades carefully.

(3) Medicine bottles and containers are on a low, open shelf next to the sink. Children, whether your own or visitors, may think pills and capsules are candy or may simply be curious. Keep all medicines out of reach of children, in a locked cabinet, and ask your pharmacist for childproof containers.

(4) A leaking pipe under the sink is leaving a puddle of water on the floor, which is a slipping hazard. Clean up puddles and get leaks fixed.

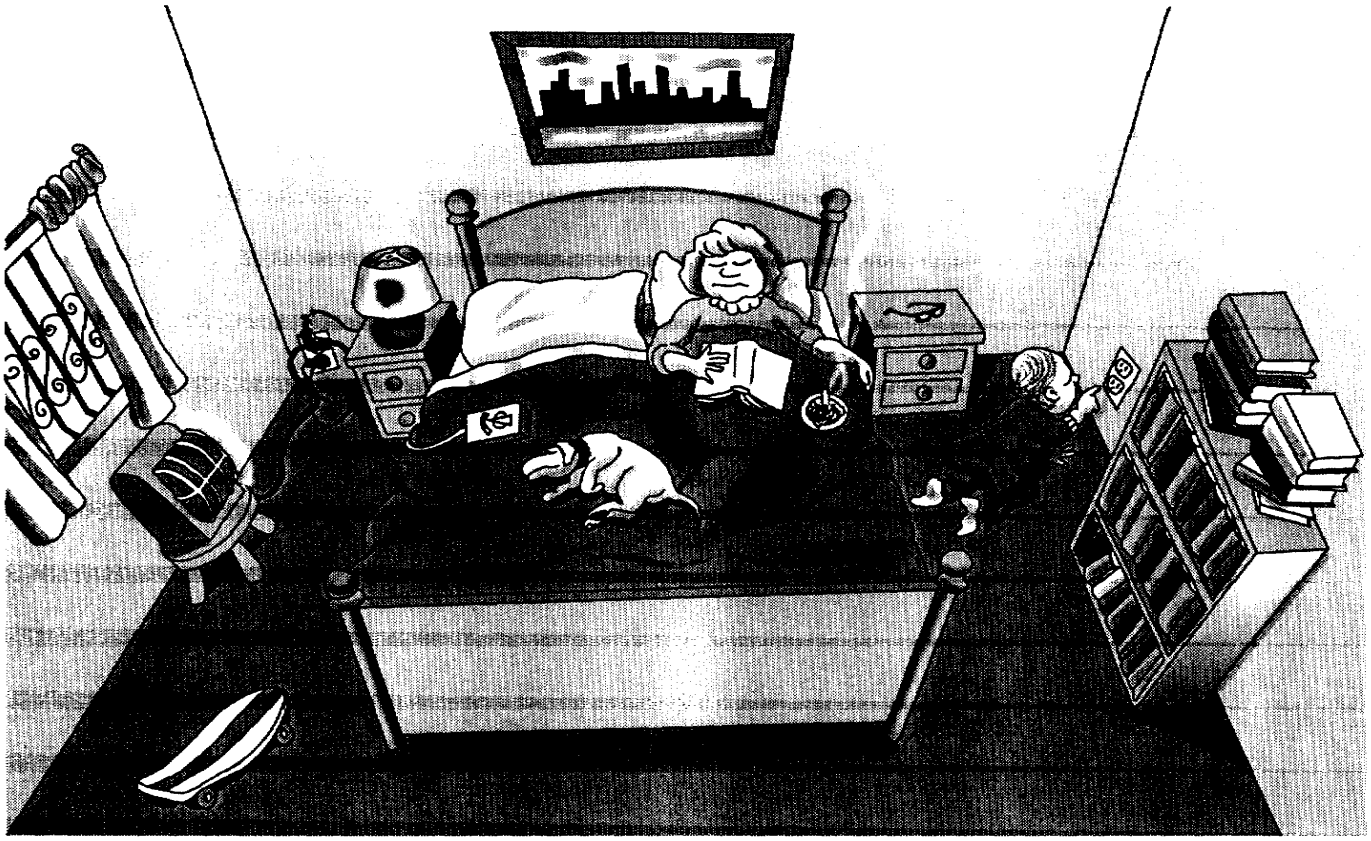
(5) A toddler is reaching for an electrical outlet. All outlets reachable by children should have childproof covers. Also, outlets in areas with moisture should have ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to prevent shocks and circuit overloads.

(6) A plugged-in radio is perched on the edge of the tub. Since water is an excellent conductor of electricity, any appliance or other source of live electrical current could cause a bather to be electrocuted.

(7) A man is slipping in the tub. Put nonslip adhesives or a mat in the floor of the tub or shower and have support bars installed around the sides.

What's Unsafe About This Bedroom?

There are at least 10 safety dangers (or missing precautions) in this bedroom. For example, there's no smoke detector on the ceiling. Can you spot the other nine hazards? Be sure to correct any similar examples in your own bedroom.



ANSWERS

(1) One of several cords going into an outlet is frayed. Overloading an outlet can lead to a blackout, and frayed cords are an electrical shock hazard. Limit the number of cords to the actual number of outlets you have and limit your power usage to your power resources. Replace frayed cords.

(2) A space heater stands next to the curtains. This is a fire hazard. Keep safe clearance around heaters.

(3) A lamp shade has a burn spot on it, which indicates that the bulb wattage is too high for the lamp. Observe the wattage limits of lamps or, if none is indicated, use a 60-watt bulb.

(4) Someone has fallen asleep while a cigarette is burning in an ashtray on the bed. Smoking in bed is the most common cause of fires at home. Don't do it.

(5) The electric blanket has been left turned on. Combined with the weight of the dog and the other blankets, the heat could accidentally burn someone in their sleep. Turn off electric blankets or turn the control to the lowest setting before you fall asleep.

(6) There's no smoke detector in the room, compounding the fire danger. Have smoke detectors installed in every bedroom.

(7) Books are piled precariously on top of the bookcase. If there's not enough room for all your books, store them in a box on the floor until you can get another bookcase.

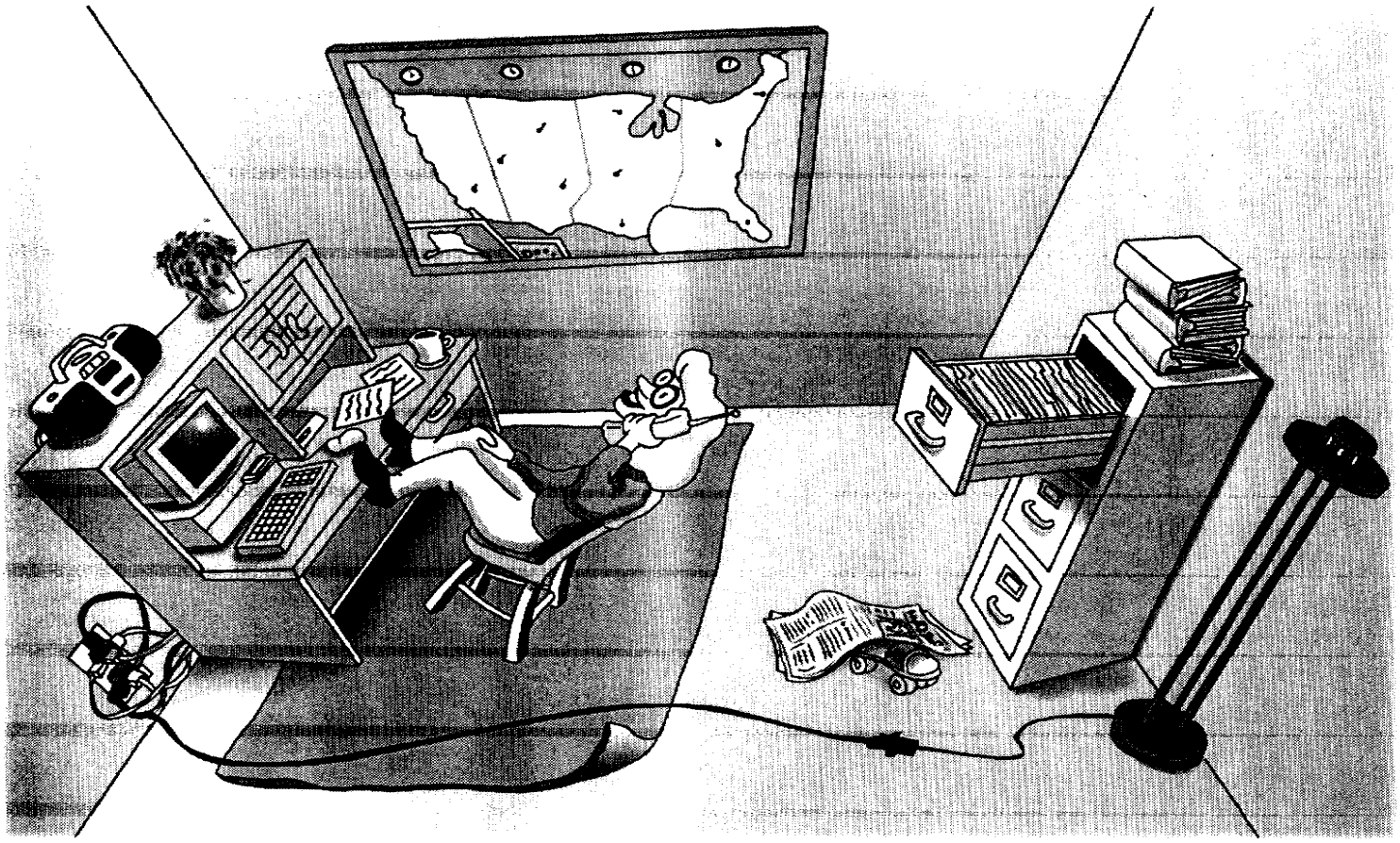
(8) A skateboard on the floor is "waiting" to be slipped on. Make sure all toys and similar obstacles are put away when not in use.

(9) A baby is crawling toward an outlet with no guard over it. Toddlers who stick their fingers into outlets can receive electric shocks or worse, especially if they've drooled on their fingers. Install childproof outlet guards on all outlets.

(10) The bars outside the window have no indoor escape latch. If the bedroom door became blocked by fire the occupant would be trapped. If you're having security grills or bars installed over bedroom windows, insist on the kind that release from inside. Replace any static bars you may now have on bedroom windows.

What's Unsafe About This Home Office?

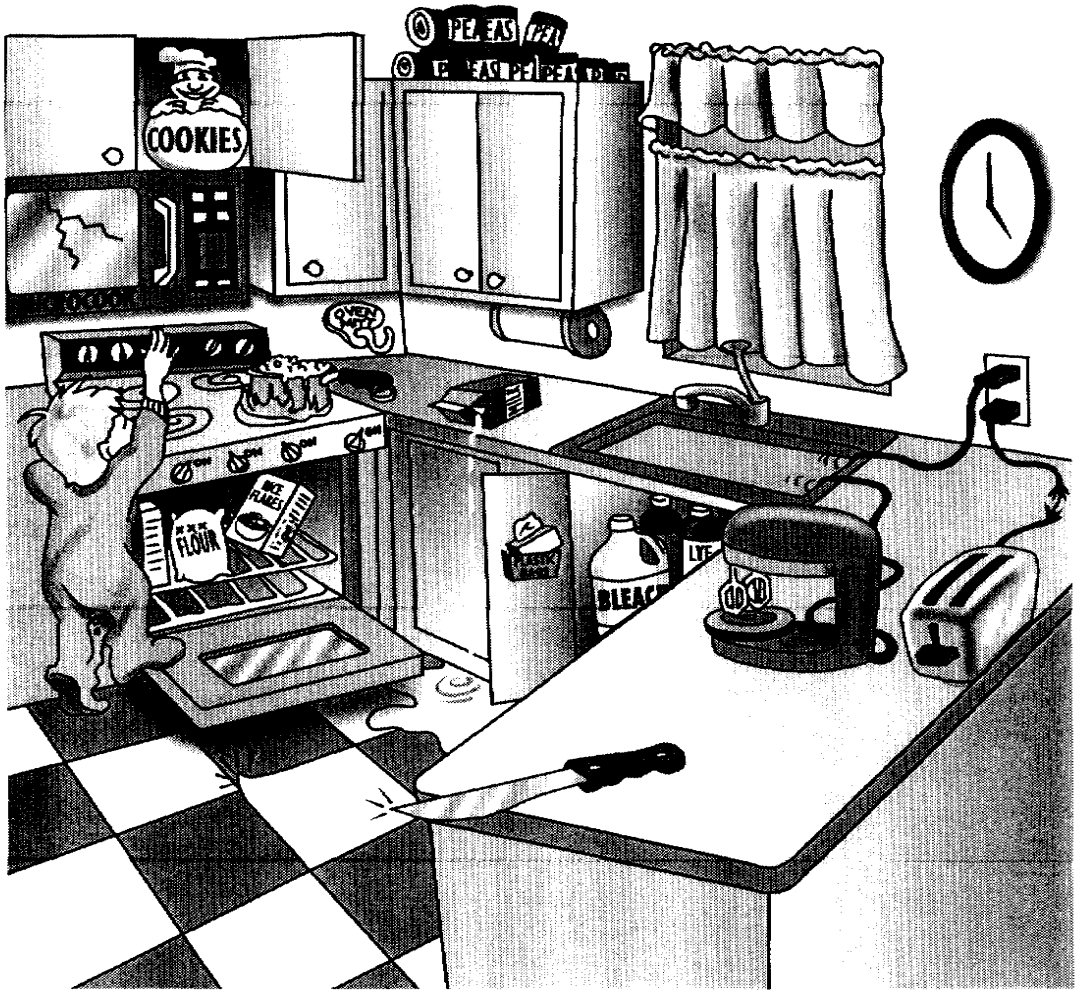
There are at least seven safety dangers in this extra bedroom used as a home office. Can you spot them all? Be sure to correct any similar examples in your own home office.



ANSWERS

(1) The edge of the carpet is curled up. Tape or tack down floor coverings that present tripping hazards.
(2) Several electric cords are networked into one outlet. Use a power strip with a surge protector for multiple cords. However, don't try to exceed the capacity of the electrical power in your home.
(3) The top drawer of the file cabinet is open all the way. This could cause a top-heavy file cabinet to topple forward, or people bending over could strike their heads on the drawer when they stand up. Close any drawers not in use and open only one drawer at a time.
(4) A tall pile of binders is balanced on top of a file cabinet. They could fall at any time and injure anyone in the way.
(5) The woman is leaning back in her chair so that it's balancing on its rear legs. This can be a dangerous balancing act. Use safe and correct posture when sitting down.
(6) An extension cord runs across the middle of the floor, a common tripping hazard. Keep cords out of foot traffic areas. Don't put them under rugs or the legs of furniture either.
(7) A roller skate under a newspaper is on the floor. Avoid such slipping hazards by having toys and other obstacles put away whenever they're not in use.

What's Unsafe About This Kitchen?



There are 13 safety dangers in this kitchen. Can you spot them all? Be sure to correct any similar examples in your own kitchen.

ANSWERS

(1) A knife is lying on the edge of a table within reach of a child. Keep kitchen gadgets and utensils in a safe place, preferably in a childproofed drawer.

(2) A puddle of milk has formed on the floor from a leaking carton on the counter. Clean up any slipping, tripping and falling hazards immediately.

(3) A toaster's plugged-in cord is frayed, a serious shock risk. Have defective electronic appliances repaired or replace them.

(4) A microwave oven has a cracked window. Dangerous microwave energy could leak out. Never try to cook with a defective or improperly sealed microwave oven. Get it fixed or replace it.

(5) An unattended pot on the range is boiling over as burner flames reach up its sides. The pot handle should be turned away from the toddler's reach. Besides the danger from burns and scalds, the high burner flame doesn't speed up cooking time and wastes natural gas.

(6) There's a hook for potholders or oven mitts near the stove but no such aids in the kitchen. Always keep something handy to hold hot objects. Kitchen towels or napkins can dangle into flames when used for holding a hot pan.

(7) Two of the range's knobs are in the "on" position, but we see only one flame, the one under the boiling pot. Make sure oven and range knobs are turned all the way off to prevent escaping gas.

(8) A toddler is near the boiling pot reaching toward a cookie jar on a shelf above the stove. Keep temptations to children away from the stove, either completely hidden or easily accessible at the child's level.

(9) Inside the open oven are boxes of cereal and a bag of flour. Don't store anything in an unused oven. The oven's pilot light alone can build up enough heat in dry flammable products to assist spontaneous combustion—or someone could turn on the oven accidentally.

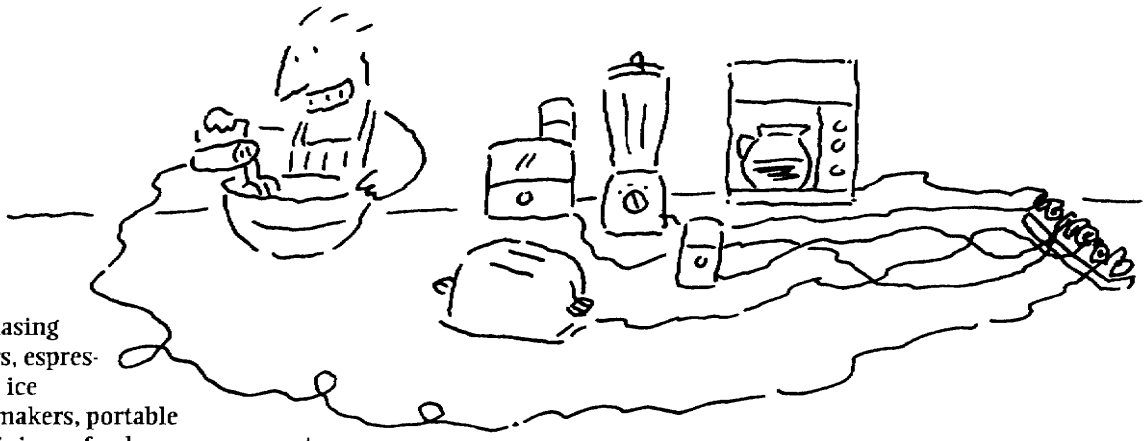
(10) An unused portable mixer is plugged in, and part of its cord is in the water in the sink. Water is a conductor of electricity, and a tiny part of the cord's wire could be exposed. Keep appliances unplugged when not in use and keep electrical cords away from water.

(11) A corner of a square of the linoleum tile on the floor is curled up, a serious tripping hazard. Repair or replace defective flooring.

(12) Dangerous chemicals and plastic bags are stored under the sink. In addition, there's no lock on the cupboard door. Either store dangerous chemicals and plastic bags (which can suffocate children) in a safe place or secure cupboard doors with childproof locks.

(13) Heavy objects are precariously stacked on top of the cupboards. An avalanche of canned and bottled goods could injure people below. Keep such things safely stored inside cupboards, preferably cupboards that latch securely.

Operating Appliances Safely



No longer is a toaster the only electronic gadget in the kitchen. Households are purchasing electric coffee grinders, espresso makers, stock pots, ice cream makers, bread makers, portable mixers and blenders, juicers, food processors, pasta makers and countertop ovens in record numbers. In other parts of the house, wet/dry vacuum cleaners, heavy-duty sewing machines and power tools are making life easier for millions of people. However, anyone who takes the time to read the safety information that accompanies each of these items will learn the risks unique to their operation. Don't take such information for granted. You may learn something that will save you or a loved one from injury.

Safety Tips for Electrical Appliances

- Unplug appliances when not in use and keep them away from the sink. If an appliance cord falls into water, turn off the appliance and unplug it before pulling the cord out of the water. Do not put your hands in the water while the power is on. Dry the plug thoroughly before using it again.
- Never stick a metal object into a toaster. Even an unplugged toaster could be damaged so that when it's turned on, a shock or short circuit could occur.
- Don't override or cut off the grounding prong of three-pronged plugs, especially for major appliances and power tools. Also avoid three-to-two-prong adapters.
- Keep any type of electric cooker as close to the center of a table as possible. This will help prevent the appliance from being knocked over.
- Using all the outlets in a "power strip" may cause a blackout in your house. If the total current drawn by the appliances plugged into the power strip exceeds the strip's stated capacity, you can easily blow a fuse or trip a circuit breaker. Compare your appliance's power needs with the power strip's capacity first.
- Never run electrical cords under carpets or under the legs of furniture.
- Keep adequate ventilation space around TVs, stereos and radios.
- Never turn on or use a hair dryer, radio, electric shaver or fan with wet hands or while standing in water or sitting in a tub of water.

Is Your Microwave Oven Safe?

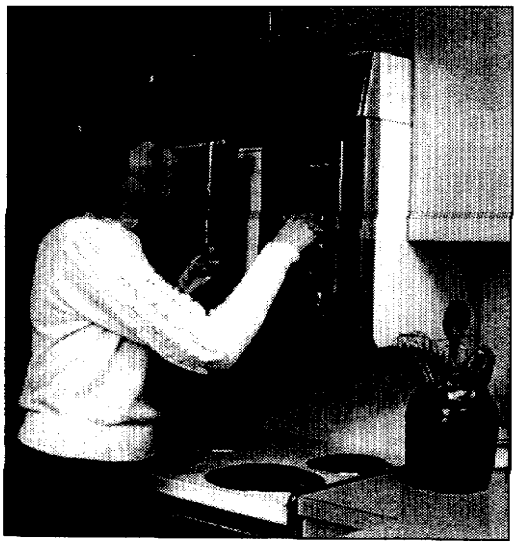
Microwave ovens have to meet strict standards for safety, but improper operation may still render an oven—or its contents—unsafe. Don't stand in front of the oven while it is operating. Periodically check the oven's interior and seals and keep them clean with a mild detergent and water, nothing abrasive. Be sure to wipe any excess soap film off the seals.

Avoid cooking food in the microwave on something containing metal. The resulting sparks and flashes could cause a fire. Even a metallic decal on a mug, the gold pattern on a plate or a piece of foil hidden in the food can do this. If a fire does start in the microwave for any reason, unplug the unit immediately. Do not open the microwave door until the fire goes out by itself.

Avoid microwaving food that's in a cold china or glass container, such as a dish that just came out of the freezer, unless it's advertised as a freezer-to-microwave container. The sudden and localized heat of the food could crack the container. Avoid putting microwavable popcorn on a plate for the same reason. Use a towel or potholders to remove any container that's been cooking in the microwave. Let dishes covered with plastic wrap cool off a minute or two before peeling the plastic back from the edge farthest away from you. Pressurized steam may have built up under the plastic.

Appliances Have Limits

Don't let the work-saving convenience of appliances prompt you to over-use or misuse them. Use each one only for its intended task and only as long as it does its job safely. You'll avoid potential accidents while appreciating the benefits of appliances all the more.



Is Your Microwave Oven Safe?

The convenience and cooking speed of microwave ovens have made them an integral tool in most kitchens today. They have to meet strict standards for safety, but improper maintenance or operation may still render a microwave oven—or its contents—unsafe. Follow these tips to avoid any safety risks from your microwave oven.

Avoid Energy Leaks

Never try to turn the microwave on with its door open and don't stand in front of the oven while it's operating. Periodically check the oven's interior and seals and keep them clean with a mild detergent and water, nothing abrasive. Be sure to wipe any excess soap film off the seals.

Proper Timing and Power Levels

Be careful when setting the microwave timer and power level. As in conventional ovens, microwave cooking times depend on the amount *of energy a particular oven produces. Ovens with a higher power* rating or a carousel spread the cooking energy more quickly than microwave ovens without these features. Such features usually indicate that a shorter cooking time is needed. To avoid boil-overs or burned food in a new microwave oven, frequently check whatever's cooking. Likewise, putting a cold spoon into a cup of water that's been overheated in a microwave can cause the water to boil up over the side of the cup, possibly burning you. Once you get familiar with your oven's typical cooking times you can safely adjust the times, and power levels recommended in recipes.

Metal and Microwaves Don't Mix

Avoid cooking food in the microwave on or in something containing metal. The resulting sparks and flashes could cause a fire. Even a metallic decal on a mug, the gold pattern on a plate or a piece of foil hidden in the food can do this. If a fire does start in the microwave for any reason, unplug the unit immediately. Don't open the microwave door until the fire goes out by itself.

Temperature Differences

Avoid microwaving food that's in a cold china or glass container, such as a dish that just came out of the freezer. The sudden and localized heat of the food could crack the container. Likewise, avoid putting microwavable popcorn on a plate when you microwave it. The heavily concentrated heat in the corn and oil could crack the dish.

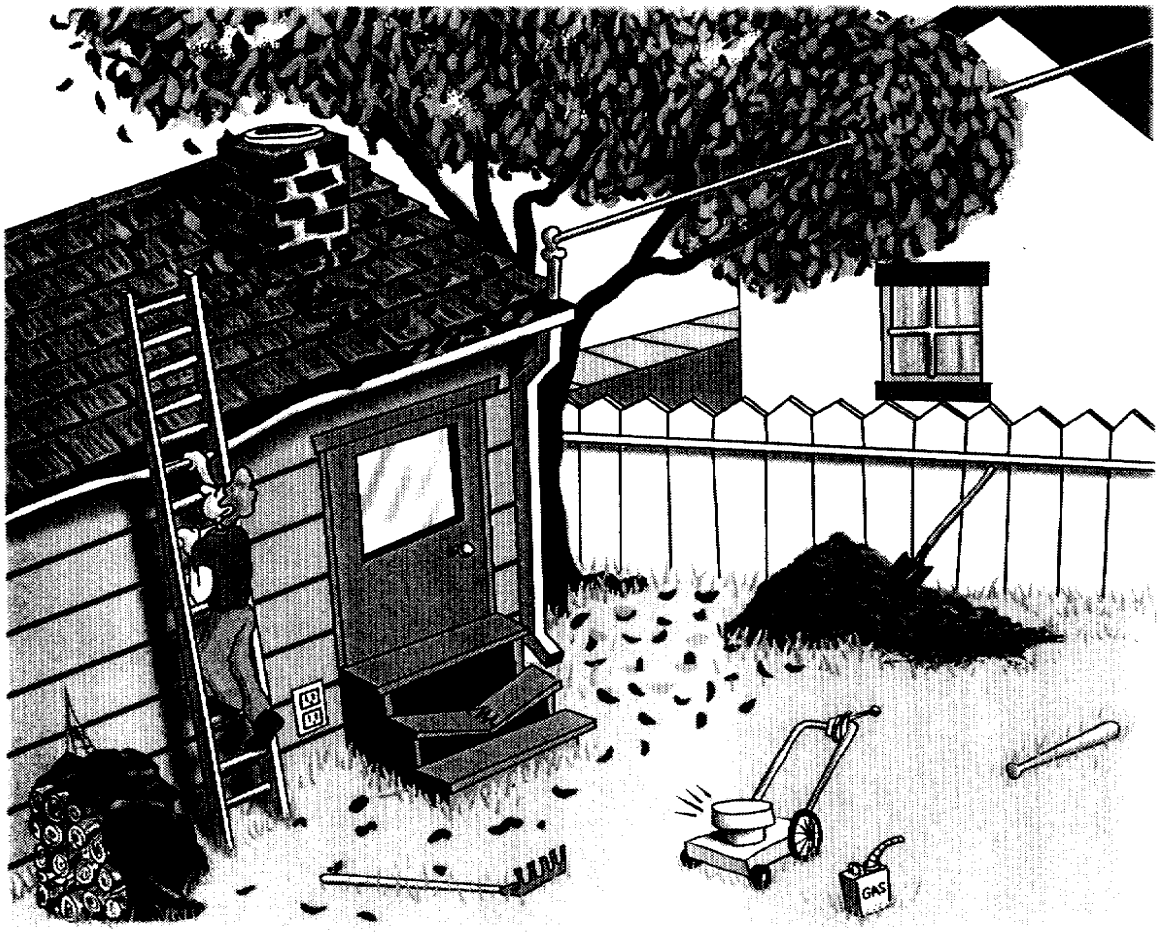
When Your Food Is Finished Cooking

Microwave ovens don't heat up containers directly, but the heated food conducts its heat to the container. Use a towel or potholders to remove any container of food that's been cooking in the microwave and let dishes covered with plastic wrap cool off a minute or two before peeling the plastic back. Even then, peel back coverings from the edge farthest away from you to make sure your skin is not exposed to escaping steam. Once the oven is empty, wipe up any spills or splatters immediately.

Professional Servicing

If your microwave oven starts taking too long to cook or malfunctions in some other way, don't try to fix it yourself. Take it to a qualified serviceman for repair before you turn it on again. Service shops can also test for microwave leakage. If leakage, a cracked door seal or glass front, or other problems can't be corrected, don't use that microwave oven again.

What's Unsafe About This Yard?



There are 12 safety dangers in this yard. Can you spot them all? Be sure to correct any similar examples in your own yard.

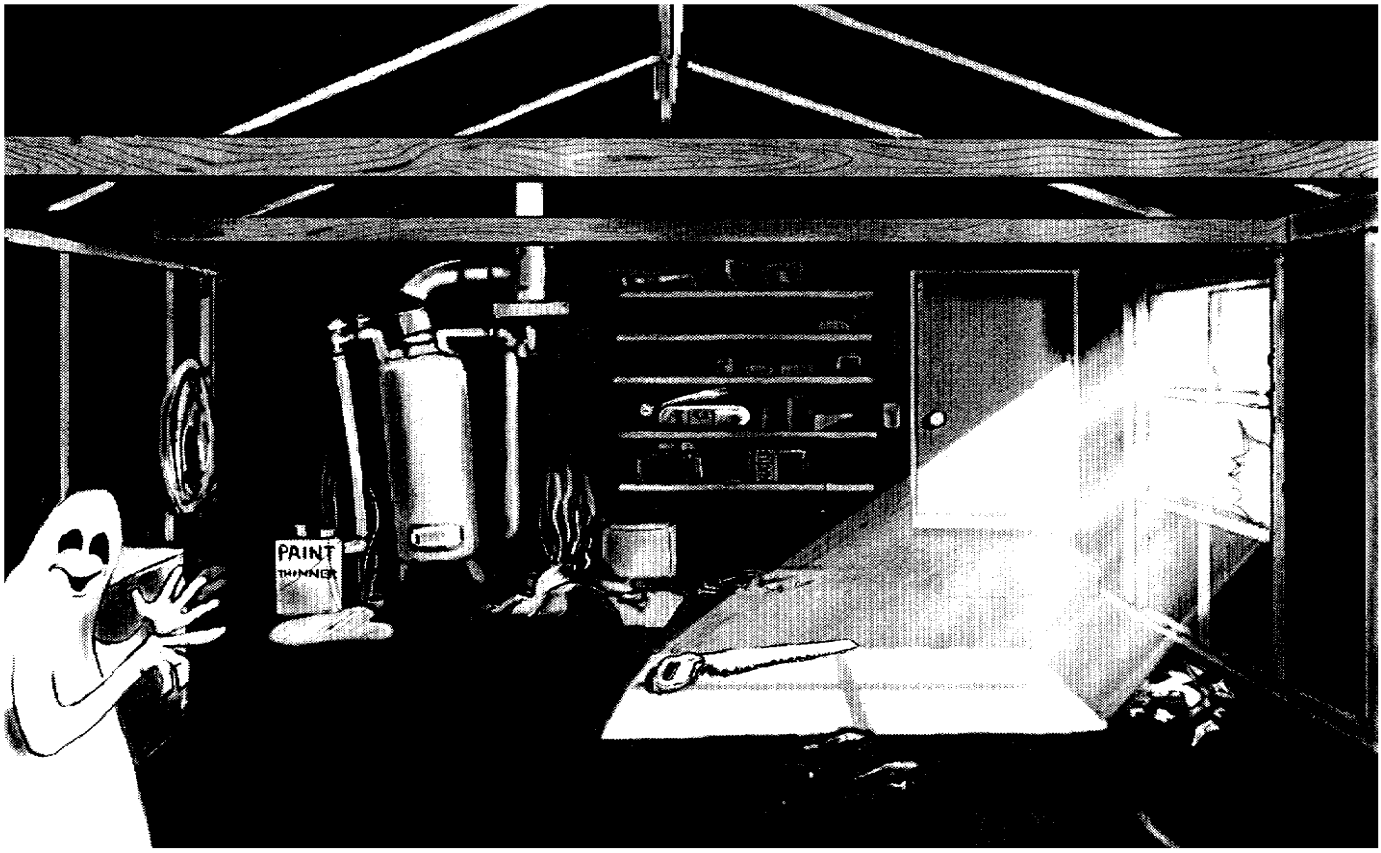
ANSWERS

(1) A rake is lying on the lawn with its teeth facing up. Clear your yard of tripping hazards.
(2) A baseball bat is lying on the ground.
(3) Power lines to the house are going through the branches of a nearby tree. A storm could cause a branch to break a line and cause a blackout, fire or electrical shock. Trim tree branches way back from power lines.
(4) One of the tree's branches is hanging over the roof of the house, near the chimney. A spark from the chimney might ignite the branch, or a fire in the tree could spread to the roof. Cut back foliage from your roof.
(5) An electrical outlet on the house has no weatherproof cover. Moisture could cause a short circuit or overload. Replace standard outlets outdoors with weatherproof versions.
(6) A pile of wood, weeds and debris is close to the house. Not only is this a fire danger, but it can hide nails and splinters, and harbor vermin and poisonous spiders. Clear debris and dry bushes or weeds at least 30 feet from around your house.
(7) The motor of a gasoline-powered mower is idling unattended, with rubber bands on the handles holding the throttle controls open. The mower could start rolling out of control. Never attempt to override the automatic shut-off controls of a machine or power tool and never leave one unattended.
(8) An open can of gasoline sits next to the mower. Gas vapors can be ignited by a motor's spark plug and cause a fire. Always start a power mower at least 10 feet from its fuel.
(9) There's an open hole in the yard with a pile of dirt next to it and a shovel standing in the dirt pile. If a hole can't immediately be filled in, put a thick sheet of plywood or other barrier over it and surround that with sawhorses topped with blinking lanterns (available from a hardware store). Always put tools safely out of the way as soon as you're finished with them or when taking a break.
(10) There's a broken step to the house and no handrail. Improperly maintained stairs are a major source of falls. Handrails are a recommended precaution, particularly for older people.
(11) An extension ladder is leaning against the house's roof gutter, weak support for a ladder. The ladder could suddenly slip forward or sideways. Find firm nonslip support for a ladder.
(12) The base of the ladder is too close to the house, and the top of the ladder extends too far above the roof. The climber could tip backward when he reaches the roof. Stabilize ladders using the "4-to-1" rule: Set the base of the ladder 1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet of ladder height.

Is Your Garage Haunted?

Garages have large open spaces that are often dark or dimly lit. They can be drafty, make sudden eerie noises (as when a furnace goes on) and have cobwebs in the corners. They can even smell "weird." A garage can certainly *seem* haunted.

There are nine safety dangers in this garage. Can you spot them? Cover the answers below until you think you've found them all. Be sure to correct any similar examples that may be lurking in your own garage.



Answers

(1) A can of paint thinner is on the floor near the water heater. Gasoline, paint thinner and solvent vapors may burn or even explode if there's a spark, static electricity or flame nearby. Always store flammable liquids in properly labeled and tightly covered containers in a cool, ventilated place and away from direct sunlight.

(2) The wrong kind of fire extinguisher is lying on a shelf. Although it's important to keep a fire extinguisher on hand, the wrong type of extinguisher can make a fire worse. A C-type fire extinguisher will work only on electrical fires. Get an ABC-type that will also extinguish wood, trash and paper fires (type A), liquid, grease and oil fires (type B) and electrical fires (type C).

(3) The water heater is leaning slightly to one side. Water heaters need solid support and should be securely strapped to a wall, especially in earthquake or tornado country.

(4) The exhaust vent from the water heater is cracked and bent. A byproduct of natural gas combustion is carbon monoxide, which can be deadly in concentrated form. This gas must be vented out of the house in a well-sealed duct. Since carbon monoxide tends to rise, the exterior opening of the duct must also be higher than the heater-end.

(5) A hand saw lies on the floor. Keep tools out of sight and out of reach of children and cover any sharp points or cutting edges.

(6) Nails on the floor have fallen out of a box on a shelf. Immediately clean up anything on the floor that shouldn't be there.

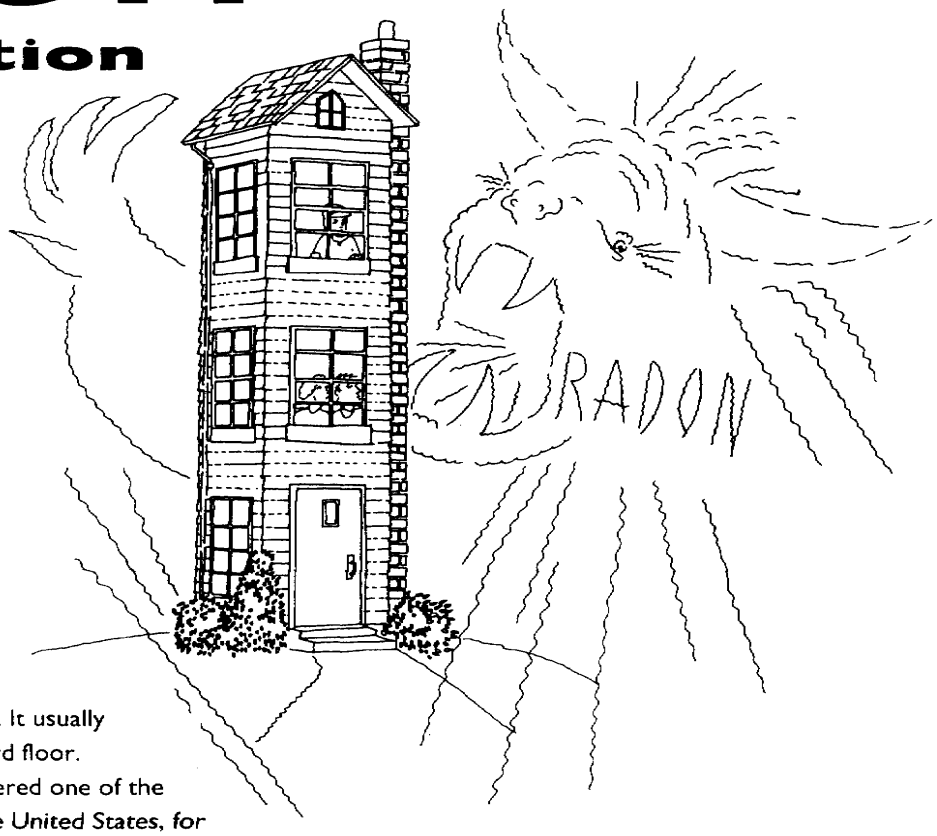
(7) There's an oil spot on the garage floor. Clean up any slipping, tripping or falling hazards right away.

(8) Oily rags lie in a pile next to the water heater. They can give off flammable vapors.

(9) A piece of glass has fallen out of a broken window and lies on the floor. Not only is the glass shard dangerous, the broken window could tempt someone to break in.

Radon

Fact and Fiction



Radon is an invisible, tasteless and odorless gas produced in the earth from decaying radioactive uranium and radium. Although radon is nearly always present in the air we breathe, it normally dissipates to harmless levels outdoors. Radon becomes dangerous when it accumulates inside buildings. If inhaled at high enough levels over time, it can increase the risk of lung cancer. Children and smokers are especially at risk.

Radon's Source and Effect

Radon enters homes and other buildings because of the vacuum effect between indoor and outdoor air pressure. As warm air rises or is pumped outside by a ventilation system, radon is drawn up from the soil into a building through its foundation or basement. It usually dissipates before it reaches the second or third floor.

Because of its radioactivity, radon is considered one of the most dangerous environmental hazards. In the United States, for example, it's estimated that radon-related lung cancer will affect four out of every 1,000 people. This risk is much higher than that associated with other environmental hazards, such as asbestos or pesticides. Radon is, in fact, the second leading cause of lung cancer, right after smoking.

Testing for Radon in Your Home

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that every building in the country be tested for radon. Tap water should also be tested. Scientists warn against thinking that radon risks are isolated to a few geographical hot spots. In fact, a house with high radon levels may be next door to a house with very low levels.

Contact your state environmental agency or the EPA directly for its listing of companies that provide reliable, long-term radon-testing kits. Test kits are sold in hardware stores or directly from the manufacturer. Periodic testing over the course of a year is more reliable than a single test, because radon levels fluctuate widely over time. If you get a high reading, don't panic. It may only be a temporary wave of radon, rather than a permanent condition.

Making Your Home Safe From Radon

You can reduce radon either by ventilating the basement and lower levels of your home or by sealing up basement or foundation openings. Both types of radon reduction may require the work of a licensed contractor. Although radon is a serious health threat, it can be reduced to an acceptable level. Test for radon now and you won't have to worry about problems in the future.

ELECTRIC HEATERS

Comfort vs. Safety

Heaters have become indispensable to many people at home, especially where there is no central forced-air heat or when the furnace is out of order. Unfortunately, heaters are responsible for an alarming number of fires, burns and other domestic accidents. You can avoid similar tragedies by following these "heater sense" guidelines.

Heater Safety Basics

If you have an older unit without an automatic safety shut-off switch, consider replacing it with a newer model. Buy only a heater approved by a nationally recognized testing lab. Never remove the screen or grille in front of the heating coils. Keep the heater at least 3 feet away from any drapes, furniture, clothing and other flammables, and keep children and pets away from the heater. Run the heater only while you're in the room, but not while sleeping. Never use the heater to dry clothes or to defrost pipes and don't turn it on if any flammable fluids or gases are nearby. Try not to use extension cords with heaters, but, if you do, use the heavy-duty orange or yellow kind made for use with power tools. Never run the cord under a carpet. Finally, never use a portable heater near water, such as in a bathroom or a damp basement, and don't touch a heater with wet hands.

Types of Heaters to Avoid

There are several types of portable electric space heaters on the market: electric-element convection, liquid-filled, ceramic, radiant and quartz. Of these, the radiant (with a shiny reflector behind the glowing heat element) and the quartz (with an electric coil element inside a quartz glass tube) are the most dangerous. They both tend to focus heat in one place, and if a cloth were to fall over them or be draped over them it could burst into flames within minutes.

Fire—The Biggest Danger From Heaters

Most heaters nowadays can't burn a carpet if tipped over because they have a built-in switch that turns the heater off if the heater falls over. Some heaters simply don't get hot enough even when turned all the way up. However, many heaters can still ignite a curtain that flaps over them, a towel that falls on them, a sofa nudged up against them or a pair of socks draped over them because "the clothes dryer didn't get the socks dry enough." Never attempt to dry laundry or anything flammable with a heater.

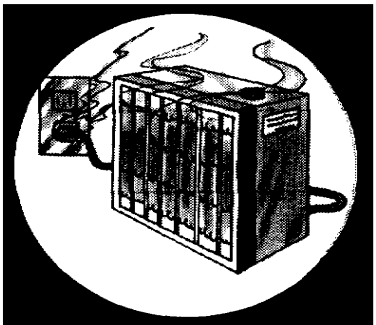
Other Liabilities of Heaters

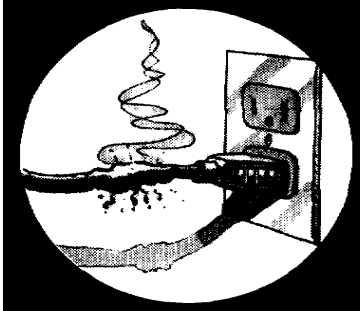
Liquid-filled, radiator-shaped electric heaters are bulky and top-heavy. A curious toddler could easily pull one over on himself or herself. Other types of heaters heat up their metal grilles so that they can give a nasty burn if accidentally touched. Some heaters have a fan that may be noisy enough to wake you up at night if you forget to turn it off before going to sleep. Heaters draw a lot of energy. Make sure your electrical capacity can handle it without causing a blackout. You may not be able to use other appliances at the same time. Never stick a finger or metal object into a heater. This is a serious shock hazard, especially for curious children.

Which Heater Is for You?

Look for heaters with their own built-in ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI); models that plug directly into an outlet without a cord; models with timers, thermostats and automatic shut-off safety features; and models that don't tip over easily.

Even with all these precautions, keep a multipurpose (ABC-type) fire extinguisher handy and make sure all bedrooms have a smoke detector in good working order.





Portable electric heaters need to be in good condition, preferably approved by a nationally recognized lab, to reduce the risk of an overloaded or short circuit. Also, check their cords for cracks, brittleness, burn marks or worn insulation. Replace such heaters or have them repaired by a professional electrician.